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New York

President:	Mr. Liu Jieyi	(China)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Zambrana
	Egypt	Mr. Tayel
	Ethiopia	Mrs. Yusuf
	France	Ms. Charrier
	Italy	Mr. Carlucci
	Japan	Mr. Takeda
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Kermkulov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Volgarev
	Senegal	Ms. Gueye
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Ilnytskyi
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Kinna
	United States of America	Mr. Ward
	Uruguay	Ms. García Moyano

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 3 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate their texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Munir (Pakistan): We thank the Chinese presidency for having organized this open debate.

Every time we meet here to discuss the situation in the Middle East, we are constrained to lament it further. The spiralling violence, the looming humanitarian catastrophe, the untold pain and human suffering are surely not sustainable. And nothing epitomizes this better than the plight of the Palestinian people, who, for the past 70 years, have suffered dispossession, displacement and deprivation at the hands of the occupation forces.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the illegal occupation of their homeland, it is unfortunate that the aspirations of the Palestinians to live a life of freedom and dignity remain a distant and elusive ideal.

The escalating tensions and violent clashes that have taken place in and around the Old City of Jerusalem during the past few days are a reminder of the fact that we are sitting on a tinderbox. As the Special Coordinator for the Middle East, Nickolay Mladenov, has rightly noted, the fallout from events taking place over a few hundred square metres affects hundreds of millions of people around the world. These people have only one demand: that the sanctity of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the status of Jerusalem be respected.

While the Security Council has taken cognizance of the gravity of the situation, words must be complemented by concrete actions. Israel must not only take immediate steps to defuse the situation, but also desist from taking any provocative measures in future.

A viable, independent and contiguous State of Palestine on the basis of the internationally agreed parameters and the pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, is the only sustainable guarantee of enduring peace in the Middle East. There is nothing more inimical to this vision than the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied territories. Yet there has been a substantial increase in settlement-related activities in the occupied lands.

This trend is emblematic of the blatant Israeli disregard for international law and the collective will of the international community, including resolution 2334 (2016). It is also a setback for peace and a retreat from the two-State solution to a one-State illusion.

Meanwhile, in its eleventh year, the suffocating Israeli blockade of Gaza is not only a humanitarian tragedy but also a moral outrage. The region can reap the dividends of peace only if such peace is predicated on the foundation of justice, an imperative that demands an end to illegal Israeli occupation and the realization of the legitimate Palestinian aspiration to statehood. A just solution for Palestine is not just a matter of regional significance; it is a primary precondition for global peace and security.

We are also concerned that the activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are facing serious resource constraints, hindering the commendable work that UNRWA is doing for Palestinian refugees.

The fight against terrorism in the Middle East has been long-drawn and protracted. Wars and foreign occupations have compounded these challenges. The liberation of Mosul is an important milestone in Iraq's fight against Da'esh and its affiliates and, we are confident, towards an inclusive Iraqi State, recognizing and reconciling the interests of the Iraqi people.

The intra-Syrian talks are central to the process of political reconciliation in that country. Successive rounds of talks have yet to deliver a major breakthrough, but the parties, major Powers and the international community in general must persist, for a military solution is neither achievable nor sustainable.

Finally, what we need for lasting peace and stability in the Middle East is firm resolve, concerted action and, above all, justice and the rule of law. This can be achieved only when all sides are willing to make difficult choices. We hope that we are willing to take that test.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Peru.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Peru welcomes the holding of this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian

question. We are also grateful for the briefing provided by Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General.

However, we deplore the ongoing deterioration of the situation on the ground, including the recent events that took place in connection with the mosque in the Old City of Jerusalem. Peru reiterates its appeal to all of the parties directly involved to temper their actions and to move towards a constructive dialogue in a framework of respect for international law and humanitarian law.

Since 1947, the year in which Peru joined the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, our position on this issue has been clear and unchanged. Peru supports the two-State solution, with secure and mutually agreed borders, as the basis for peaceful coexistence. In that regard, Peru encourages and supports the various initiatives carried out by the international community, which are aimed at resolving the Palestinian question and would allow for the implementation of the agreements reached in Madrid and Oslo. Peru believes that renewing the commitment to resuming peace talks on the basis of the two-State solution at the summit of the League of Arab States is a positive step forward. Likewise, it believes that the visit undertaken by the President of the United States of America to the region on his first trip abroad could foster the conditions necessary for a resumption of the political dialogue. We also highlight the good offices of various European and Asian States.

Peru emphasizes the importance of complying with resolution 2334 (2016), adopted in December 2016, which urges Israel to cease settlement building in the territories it has occupied since 1967. That practice, which has become more intense in recent months, is contrary to international law and poses a serious threat to the territorial integrity of the Palestinian State and to the prospect of the two-State solution.

In addition, Peru recognizes Israel's inalienable right to preserve its own security and existence, including by exercising its legitimate right to self-defence, while emphasizing that it must do so under the principles of proportionality and legality. In accordance with resolution 2334 (2016), Peru strongly condemns the commission of terrorist acts against the civilian population and the motivations of the perpetrators of such acts.

Peru notes with concern the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. The extreme divisions among Palestinian leaders themselves, along with the scarcity of basic services and restrictive measures imposed by Israel, lead to despair, a greater proclivity for hate speech and additional and more serious outbreaks of violence. There is an urgent need for the international community to provide greater support to those who face such a tragic situation.

The scant progress made in the peace process and growing differences make it imperative for the international community to address the Palestinian question with a renewed sense of urgency. The United Nations and the Security Council, in particular, have a very important role to play. As a non-permanent member of the Council in 2018 and 2019, Peru will continue to support the facilitation of a minimum framework of understanding for the resumption of direct negotiations between the parties and to improve the situation on the ground.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. García Moritán (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Sir, for having convened today's open debate.

Argentina has always maintained a principled position in favour of resolving disputes and conflicts by peaceful means; respect for international law, sovereignty, independence, national unity and territorial integrity of States; the rejection of the acquisition of territories by force; and confidence in the constructive role and persuasive power of the international community in order to pave the way for peaceful, just and lasing solutions to conflicts.

The situation in the Middle East, in particular the Palestinian question, has been addressed by the Security Council since 1947 and remains one of the longest-running and most intractable conflicts on the international agenda. In the light of that situation, we should ask ourselves what we can do as members of the international community to help find a just and lasting solution within the framework of the Council. In that regard, Argentina believes that overcoming differences is a priority so that the parties can resume negotiations. My country strongly supports all efforts to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East, both in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and in the no less serious situations in other countries of the region.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of historic resolution 242 (1967), we again reiterate our firm support for a peaceful, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question on the basis of the two-State solution, based on 1967 borders and on what was agreed by the parties during the negotiations process. Argentina reaffirms its support for the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent and viable State, recognized by the entire international community, as well as the right of the State of Israel to live in peace with its neighbours, within secure and internationally recognized borders.

Similarly, Argentina reiterates its concern about the persistent and continued construction of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and calls for an end to their expansion, as set out in resolution 2334 (2016), adopted by the Council in December 2016. The international community, as a whole, has made it very clear that the settlements are contrary to international law, hamper peace, weaken the prospect of a two-State solution, with both States living in peace and security, and therefore perpetuates an untenable status quo. We also believe that it is necessary for Palestinian leaders to earnestly address Israeli security concerns. Argentina believes that it is unacceptable for Hamas and other Palestinian groups to carry out attacks against Israeli civilians. My country strongly condemns all terrorist acts.

Argentina reaffirms the special status of Jerusalem, in accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and rejects any unilateral measure aimed at changing it. My country believes that the holy city should be a place of assembly and peace, and that the members of the three major monotheistic religions — Judaism, Christianity and Islam — should be guaranteed free access to the holy sites.

Regrettably, over the past few days the security situation in the city of Jerusalem has deteriorated considerably. The Republic of Argentina is concerned about the spike in violence and repudiates the slew of acts that have claimed the lives of several Palestinian citizens and members of the Israeli security forces. The escalation of fanaticism and the violence that ensues cannot be allowed to undermine the right of societies to live in peace and freedom, in full enjoyment of their civil rights. Our country therefore believes that none of the parties should take unilateral measures that could affect the status quo.

Unfortunately, that is not the only issue that concerns us in the Middle East. Argentina notes with concern developments in the situation in Syria, in particular the humanitarian situation and condemns all acts of violence, particularly those targeting the civilian population. Our country rejects terrorism in all its forms and condemns in the strongest terms the terrorist activity of the organization that refers to itself as the Islamic State, and the Al-Nusra Front.

We also strongly condemn the use of chemical weapons in any situation, under any circumstances and by any actor. We also firmly believe that all those responsible for their use should be brought to justice. In that regard, we support the impartial and technical work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism.

Argentina supports a political solution in Syria, through dialogue and diplomacy, as well as respect for international law and the principles of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. We therefore attach particular importance to the negotiations in Geneva and Astana. Considerable progress has been made because these two initiatives complement each other. We also welcome the agreement reached between the United States, the Russian Federation and Jordan on 9 July to bring about a ceasefire in south-eastern Syria.

With regard to the situation in Iraq, we are pleased to note that the Iraqi army has recently retaken control of Mosul. We regret the many lives lost as a result of the terrorist acts carried out by the self-proclaimed Islamic State.

We would also like to make mention of the crisis among the countries of the Gulf, which is a new source of tension in the region and cause of concern for our country. Argentina hopes that all of the parties involved, with whom we have close cooperation links, can find a solution, through dialogue and diplomatic negotiations. We support Kuwait's mediation efforts and the initiatives taken by various actors within the international community to improve relations among the parties. We call for restraint and stress that all decisions and actions should be in line with international law to prevent an escalation of the situation and any social and economic consequences that would have an adverse effect on the civilian population. We condemn terrorism in all its forms and view it as a common enemy that we must defeat.

Peace in the Middle East will be possible only through greater diplomatic efforts and negotiation. The Council should spare no effort in encouraging the parties concerned in that direction, consistent with the parameters recognized by the international community in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, a two-State solution based on agreements between the parties, the Quartet road map and the Arab Peace Initiative, as well as a mutually acceptable solution to the situation in Jerusalem and a just settlement of the refugee issue.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I would like to align myself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands is central to every conflict in the Middle East. That injustice has continued for more than seven decades and has been exacerbated by Israeli expansionism and aggressive policies towards the Palestinians and the region. Any attempt to exclude the issue from Security Council debates is simply a denial of obvious facts and the suffering of innocent people.

The Israeli regime's entire history has been defined by acts of aggression towards its neighbours and other countries in the Middle East and beyond that have occurred at least 14 times since 1948. Emboldened by the support of the new United States Administration, the Israeli authorities have been questioning and challenging the Palestinians' inalienable right to their homelands as never before. That aggression has continued on a daily basis, the latest episode being a brutal crackdown on the oppressed nation of Palestine under the pretext of preventing Palestinian worshippers from entering the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Israeli regime has continued to arrogantly and flagrantly violate dozens of Security Council resolutions, from resolution 54 (1948) to resolution 2334 (2016), as well as many other resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and specialized United Nations agencies on illegal settlement activities. The violations are made possible by the international community's irresponsible granting of total impunity to the regime.

Israel also continues to flout all the international regimes designed to govern weapons of mass destruction by refusing to adhere to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention. The nuclear weapons in its hands represent the most serious threat there is to the security of every State in the Middle East. World Powers, especially the United States, are undermining the stabilization and counter-terrorism efforts that they claim to champion by dumping untold amounts of beautiful military equipment in the hands of irresponsible State and non-State actors in the service of adventurist projections of power. The profits that these wealthy countries reap from such transfers have come at a tremendous cost to the region's security and its people.

The United States and its allies are bombing Syria and Yemen, using cluster munitions or enforcing blockades of humanitarian aid under the guise of restoring legitimacy. Such actions are the seeds of new conflicts. The world remembers vividly how the last United States invasion in the Middle East, launched on false pretences based on allegations of the existence of weapons of mass destruction, resulted in the deaths of more than half a million people in Iraq and in the rebirth of Da'esh. When is the Council is going to seek accountability for those who created and support the Taliban, Al-Qaida and Da'esh and its affiliated groups, or for their role in the proliferation of terrorist activities in the Middle East and around the globe?

Iran has always supported efforts to resolve the Syrian conflict diplomatically and has advocated for the self-determination of the Syrian people. Our assistance to the Syrian Government is geared towards counter-terrorism and de-escalation. Our participation in the Astana, International Syria Support Group and Geneva processes is testament to that. We continue to welcome any genuine effort to help stabilize the situation on the ground, as a prerequisite for any political process that will enable the Syrian people to decide their own future.

Today we heard some unsubstantiated allegations about my country that I categorically reject as part of the misinformation and propaganda campaign against Iran that has been designed and perpetrated with hysteria by Israel and various countries of the region, including some that wholeheartedly supported Saddam Hussein's aggression against Iran.

I would like to conclude on a rare happy note by offering our heartfelt congratulations to the brave people and Government of Iraq on the liberation of

Mosul from the takfiri Da'esh terrorist group that has wreaked havoc not only in Iraq but in the entire region.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Ms. Adamson: The candidate country Albania, the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the European Free Trade Association country Liechtenstein align themselves with this statement.

The Middle East peace process remains a key priority for the European Union (EU), whose positions have not changed. We see no viable alternative to a negotiated two-State solution that fulfils the legitimate aspirations of both parties — including Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty — and that ends the occupation that began in 1967 and resolves all permanent status issues. Resolution 2334 (2016), while reaffirming all of the Council's relevant previous resolutions since 1967, reiterated the key threats to the viability of the two-State solution, notably the continued Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. It also clearly condemned acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, as well as all acts of provocation, incitement or destruction.

The latest developments in and around the Old City of Jerusalem and in the West Bank pose a real risk of further escalation. Three Palestinians were killed during violent clashes with Israeli security forces on Friday. These incidents must be fully investigated. In a terror attack in the West Bank during the night of Friday and Saturday, three Israelis were murdered at their Shabbat dinner table by a young Palestinian. Nothing can justify such a despicable crime. Since then, there have been further attacks in Israel and Jordan, and two Jordanians have lost their lives. The EU strongly condemns acts of terror, expresses its regret for all the losses of innocent life caused by the violence and hopes for a speedy recovery for the wounded.

We appreciated President Abbas's condemnation of the attack on Israeli police officers in the Old City of Jerusalem, sacred to three religions, and the assurances by Prime Minister Netanyahu that the status quo at Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount will be preserved. It is now vital to ensure that all political, religious and community leaders act responsibly, restore calm and avoid any acts or rhetoric that could further increase tensions. Continued cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority is crucially important if we are to prevent further violence and loss of life. We encourage Israel and Jordan to work together to find solutions and ensure security for all, respect the sanctity of the holy site and uphold the status quo, noting the special role of the Hashemite Kingdom, as recognized in its peace treaty with Israel.

The EU also strongly opposes the recent Israeli decisions to proceed with plans for thousands of settlement units in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and stresses the Security Council's repeated demand that Israel cease all settlement activities immediately and completely. Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory constitute a flagrant violation of international law and a major obstacle to peace, and threaten to make a two-State solution impossible.

The EU has been following the worsening situation in Gaza. We commend the efforts by the United Nations and Egypt to mediate and provide and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance and fuel to the Gaza Strip. The EU will continue to provide humanitarian and development assistance to Gaza. A single, legitimate and democratic Palestinian Authority, with full control over Gaza, is critical for achieving a viable Palestinian State.

The EU stands ready to support all serious peacemaking efforts. We welcome ongoing United States efforts and those of the Quartet, including the holding of a meeting of envoys on 13 July. We recall the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative, which provides key elements for a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Let me turn to Lebanon and the endorsement of a new electoral law by the Parliament on 16 June, on the basis of which parliamentary elections will take place by May 2018. Conducting peaceful, fair and transparent parliamentary elections will be key to ensuring the functioning of Lebanese democratic institutions. In last week's Association Council between the EU and Lebanon, the EU recognized Lebanon's extraordinary and exceptional effort in hosting more than 1 million Syrian refugees. We are committed to maintaining the level of our support in 2018 and 2019. The EU and Lebanon agreed that the only sustainable long-term solution for refugees and displaced persons from Syria

into Lebanon is their safe return to their country of origin in accordance with all norms of international humanitarian law, while taking into account the interests of the host countries, as conditions for such a return are met.

In Syria, we hope that the implementation of de-escalation arrangements towards a nation-wide cessation of hostilities and unhindered humanitarian access will help facilitate the intra-Syrian talks under United Nations auspices in Geneva. Thus far, Damascus has refused to engage substantially in those negotiations. The EU continues to call for full, unhindered humanitarian access and for accountability for all violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. The EU has just allocated €1.5 million to the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. Only when a credible transition is firmly under way will the EU be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria.

In Iraq, the liberation of Mosul was a highly symbolic step in the defeat of Da'esh, although it does not mark the end of military operations. Several very sensitive areas remain to be recovered from Da'esh. But even then, the territorial defeat of Da'esh is only one of the challenges. Winning the peace with the population is an equally challenging and urgent task for the Iraqi Government. The EU calls on the federal Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to build on their successful security cooperation in the campaign to liberate Mosul and engage in a constructive dialogue on all issues across the political and economic spectrum, including the disputed internal boundaries. Unilateral steps must be avoided.

Lastly, Iraq is in need of international support to face all these huge challenges. The EU is committed to providing such support and is stepping up its efforts. More than €200 million is programmed for 2017. A Common Security and Defence Policy mission will be deployed to advise and assist in the reform of the security sector, as well as in delivering on humanitarian needs and stabilization.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Begeç (Turkey): We have repeatedly underlined at the Security Council that the Israeli-Palestine conflict remains the core challenge to lasting and regional peace. The recent developments in Jerusalem should remind all of us that we should never lose sight of that fact. In that regard, we regret all loss of life and condemn all violence.

The immediate priority must be a rapid de-escalation and exercise of restraint by all parties. We should not see this as another perennial round of skirmishes and stand idle until the situation calms down. At the same time, we all should acknowledge the importance of the preservation of the historic status and sanctity of Al-Haram Al-Sharif for the Islamic world. Attempts to change the status quo jeopardize peaceful coexistence. Jerusalem, a city sacred to Islam, Judaism and Christianity, should be treated with the utmost respect. The closure of Al-Haram Al-Sharif for days and the subsequent decision to place metal detectors at its entrances along with other restrictions on Muslims's entry there are unacceptable. Those mistakes, as well as the disproportionate use of force against Palestinians who were on the streets for prayers, cannot be justified by any means.

We expect Israel to listen to the calls of the international community, fulfil its legal obligations as the occupying Power in East Jerusalem and lift all the restrictions that limit access to Al-Haram Al Sharif. In that regard, Israel's decision to remove the metal detectors was a step in the right direction. Return to the status quo in its full letter and spirit is essential for the restoration of calm. This is a matter of freedom of religion and worship.

The grim situation reflects the far-reaching effects of the absence of real hope for peace. Only a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, which would lead to the establishment of an independent State of Palestine within the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital can ensure peace and security for both sides. In that regard, measures in contravention of international law, in particular settlement activities, which are an obstacle to the two-State solution, must be discontinued.

To reach a lasting peace, it is also important for the Palestinians to voice their legitimate demands in unity. Turkey is determined to continue to carry out its efforts to that end and supports the initiatives that respect the established parameters, including the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Fully aware of the dire humanitarian situation in Palestine, especially in Gaza, Turkey also continues

its efforts to improve the living conditions of the Palestinians through development assistance and reconstruction projects. The third Turkish shipment of 10.000 tons of humanitarian aid reached Gaza in June. While working on possible ways to remedy the grave scarcity of water and electricity in Gaza, Turkey has allocated $500,000 to the occupied Palestinian territory Humanitarian Fund for the purchase of emergency fuel to maintain the delivery of essential services in response to the appeal of the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. Furthermore, we continue to support the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East given its essential role in the lives of Palestine refugees.

Since the very beginning of the Syrian conflict, Turkey has undertaken intensive efforts to end the violence in Syria and reach a political solution based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), as outlined in resolution 2254 (2015). While a genuine political transition is the only way to end the Syrian conflict, negotiations to that end cannot bear fruit if the fighting continues. For that reason, we facilitated and became the guarantors of a nationwide ceasefire with the Russian Federation and Iran. The Astana meetings, which are complementary and supportive to the United Nations-led Geneva political process, aim at strengthening the ceasefire and adopting confidence-building measures.

At the fourth round of high-level meetings held in Astana on 3 and 4 May, a memorandum on the establishment of de-escalation areas in certain parts of Syria was adopted. Issues related to the delineation of the de-escalation areas, as well as to their administration will be finalized by the joint working group formed among the three guarantors. The significant reduction of violence achieved on the ground has established an environment conducive to holding the last three rounds of the Geneva talks. The opposition once again demonstrated political maturity and demonstrated its credibility by engaging in real talks, as well as increased the interaction among various groups. The regime's representatives should not be allowed to continue their intransigent stance and poison the upcoming talks with both violations on the ground and harmful rhetoric at the table.

Only a multidimensional strategy can achieve the dual objectives of eliminating terrorism and stabilizing Syria. Turkey's resolve to fight Da'esh and other terrorist organizations such as the Democratic Union Party and the Kurdish People's Protection Units remains firm. Unilateral steps threatening the unity, the territorial integrity and the demographic structure of Syria and efforts to seek territorial expansion for political leverage are unacceptable. We cannot afford to repeat the mistakes that were made in Manbij, only this time, in Raqqa. Together with its partners, Turkey will continue its efforts to address the plight of the Syrian people and find a solution to the conflict that will meet their legitimate aspirations.

We would like to congratulate the Iraqi security forces for their success in liberating Mosul from Da'esh. We are confident that permanent peace and stability in Iraq will be achieved through inclusive national reconciliation. Unilateral moves that challenge Iraq's territorial integrity and political unity will only additionally lead to instability and entail negative consequences.

In the near future, Turkey is ready to contribute to the reconstruction efforts of Mosul and to the elimination of the conditions that led to the emergence of Da'esh and other radical organizations.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Namibia.

Ms. Scott (Namibia): Let me congratulate you, Mr. President, on the assumption of your country, China, of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of July 2017, and thank you for organizing the debate on the important topic of the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestine question. We also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

These five decades of occupation in Palestine have seen ongoing violence in seemingly unending cycles. Our debate here in the Security Council keeps us focused on seeking a peaceful resolution to this complex situation. During the United Nations Forum to Mark Fifty Years of Occupation, held on 29 and 30 June under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Secretary-General was on point when he stated that, by bringing an end to this conflict situation, a major driver of violent extremism and terrorism in the Middle East

region would be removed. There are few who would disagree. Indeed, the Secretary-General's call must be taken as a call for a return to direct negotiation to resolve the status issues contained in United Nations resolutions, agreements and international law, and also by resolutely establishing the two-State solution as a basis for peace.

Namibia calls on Israel to comply with Security Council resolutions and to implement agreements it has reached on the two-State solution, based on the 1967 borders. Namibia has stood alongside the rest of the United Nations membership in calling for peace and dialogue in order to seek a just solution to the question of statehood in Palestine. Namibia therefore welcomes the decision of Israel to withdraw the metal detectors, and calls for respect for the holy sites in Jerusalem. Namibia also calls on Israel to desist from building settlements in violation of previous agreements and United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), which is a continued affront to the dignity and property ownership of the Palestinian people.

Namibia is also apprehensive about the continued tensions which seem to be causing dangerous and global polarization and violent extremism. The conflicts in Syria and Yemen, coupled with terrorism across the Middle East, are causing untold suffering and a humanitarian crisis equivalent to some of the worst this world has seen. We urge all parties in the Middle East to work with seriousness to silence the war drums.

Once again, we call on the Israeli Government to end its ongoing punitive destruction of Palestinian homes and infrastructure, and to cease its illegal construction of settlements on occupied territory. We call on all parties to move towards rather than away from the tables of dialogue and compromise in order to seek a just peace and solution to the conflict. Namibia once again calls for Israel's complete an unconditional withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. We urge the international community to facilitate the creation of a Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders.

Namibia stands with the people of Palestine in their determined efforts for the pursuit of their inalienable right to self-determination, justice, freedom and independence through political, diplomatic, peaceful and non-violent means. We call on all other States Members of the United Nations to support any deliberation that would result in an end to half a century of occupation, to see the Palestinian people exercising their inalienable rights in an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and as a rightful member of the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): The delegation of Indonesia is pleased to join this Security Council open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

We thank the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his comprehensive briefing.

This year, we mark the fiftieth year of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. But it is no happy anniversary. Day by day, the blockade of Gaza, the illegal Wall in the West Bank, the aggressive illegal settlement expansions, the collective punishment being inflicted on Palestinians, the perpetual use of violence, the rejection of the self-determination of the Palestinian people, and their lack of access to natural resources all continue to worsen the situation on the ground. As a result, the conflict poses a continuing threat to international peace and security. In that regard, members of the international community should commit to pursue a just and lasting solution, one that the two-State solution envisages.

Today, once again, we reaffirm our faith in resolution 2334 (2016) of December 2016, and call for its full and unfettered implementation. One should recall that, in the quest to eliminate obstacles on the road to peace, the Council in its wisdom has rejected Israel's establishment of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967. It has declared the settlements not simply to be illegal and a flagrant violation of international law, but also a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. Regrettably, not only has Israel continued to defy the Council, but we, as Member States, have yet to receive the substantive published report of the Secretary-General concerning the implementation of the resolution. We join all those who believe that this is a minimum standard in moving forward.

It is matter of record that just three months after the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), the Government

of Israel announced the construction of the first new settlement in two decades in Emek Shilo in the West Bank, as if to challenge the Council. Nonetheless, as we marked the fiftieth anniversary of the occupation here at the United Nations last month, it was remarkable to observe the increased interaction among stakeholders, particularly between Palestinian and Israeli youth, and greater support not only from the younger Jewish community within the United States and Israel. We believe this is a good sign for the future. We strongly believe that Palestinian children deserve the same right to be free in their own land, no less than the Israeli children in their land.

We need to continue our support for the Palestinians so they are not left behind, hence the importance of supporting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and its work, including ensuring continued resources.

It is a matter of great significance that this debate follows yet another unmasking of a new face of Israeli aggression on Palestinians in the occupied territory, in the form of the closure of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Essentially, any attack on the Al-Aqsa Mosque is to be considered a very dangerous red line. The Government and people of Indonesia strongly condemn it, as we do any act of aggression capable of harming any holy site. The closure of Al-Aqsa not only worsens the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, it signals to the world how strongly Israel wishes to distance itself from the two-State solution. The closure of Al-Aqsa constitutes a blatant move of Israel in its continuing effort to alter the geographic and demographic character of Jerusalem.

The international community must prevail over the attempts by the occupation force to alter the status quo in the Holy City, in violation of its international and humanitarian law. The closure is a flagrant violation of the freedom of religion and the right to pray. Continuous efforts to curtail and hamper the ability of worshippers to enter the mosque not only contradict all the basic tenet of decency, but will also worsen the situation, not only in Jerusalem but in the rest of the world. It will create more division and mistrust and further animosity that will lead to radicalism and extremism. My delegation therefore urges all sides to make an honest effort to reduce tensions, restore calm, end the crisis and seek a solution that would ensure public safety and the security of the site, while maintaining the status quo of the Holy City.

If need be, the international community could explore the possibility of ensuring that the holy Mosque of Al-Aqsa remains under United Nations international protection and supervision so as to ensure that all worshippers are able to conduct their religious activities in peace and harmony. We have to ensure that an international mechanism exists to forestall any recurrence of impulsive actions by Israel, such as the closure of the holy Mosque.

Although my delegation will not condone the use of violence, but we also cannot — and I repeat, cannot — tolerate the systemic violation and abuse of the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to observe their religious practices and the very existence of their dignity as human beings. No human rights are human rights, unless and until the occupying Power yields to the Palestinians their human rights. In that regard, I once again say that enough is enough.

I would like to conclude by emphasizing the message that, unless there is a genuine intention by Israel to find a lasting two-State solution, we will continue to have countless crises on our hands. The world cannot survive ever-more crises. Do we have to wait another 50 years to see a free and independent Palestine? Like any peace-loving country with a conscience and a measure of humanity, Indonesia will remain relentless in its support for the Palestinian cause.

Finally, it is sad to see the reality of Palestinian lives in Jerusalem. People have lost children, families, belongings and lands. Now, they have lost the right to pray in the most holy of mosques. What more is left of human dignity?

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): We thank the Chinese presidency for having arranged such an important open debate. We would also like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his very important briefing to the Security Council.

We echo the statement made by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, as well as the statement delivered by the representative of Uzbekistan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Today's periodic meeting is taking place at a time when sad events have recently occurred. We have seen

an unfortunate escalation in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly in Jerusalem — an escalation in the situation that has served to raise awareness among the international community. Given the will of Israel to transform the conflict into a religious conflict and the arbitrary and constrictive security measures that have been imposed by the Israelis on the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, we declare those actions to constitute a violation of international norms and standards. It goes without saying that there will be further violence in the future as long as the Palestinian cause remains without a solution, given that the occupation continues. If the Council does not end Israeli practices, then it is as if we are encouraging Israel to continue its practices and aggression.

The State of Kuwait roundly condemns Israel's violations of international agreements as an occupying Power in Jerusalem. Furthermore, my country categorically rejects any policies or plans on the part of Israel that aim to Judaize the holy city, including isolating the city's environment and manipulating the city's demographics. Those are violations of international peace and security. That is why we call on the international Community to take on its responsibilities and face up to Israel's criminal actions in Jerusalem, particularly under the relevant Security Council resolutions, which reject any change in Jerusalem. Furthermore, we call on the international community to block any attempt by Israel at any time to change the historic status quo of the holy sites. It is necessary that we safeguard the religious status of those religious sites, which would allow worshipers to pray far free violence and provocations. Israel should remove the difficulties and obstacles.

All the measures taken by the occupying Power up to this point are not acceptable because they are insufficient. Israel needs to take additional measures. The practices of the occupying Power, Israel, on the occupied Palestinian territories, including in East Jerusalem, run counter to its legal commitments that have been established through international agreements and treaties, including the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. We should condemn those practices in the international community and through the Security Council. We should reject what Israel is doing in its closing of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound and putting obstacles in place that prevent the Palestinian people from exercising their religion.

The Security Council should protect the Palestinian people. Their fundamental rights have been violated by the occupying Power. Palestinians are suffering from religious terrorist attacks that are being carried out by the settlers and others. There are measures attempting to change the situation on the ground and impede the search for a two-State solution. I want to reiterate that peace should begin with the end of the occupation, which is entering its fiftieth year. The peace should be based on the legitimacy of international agreements and the Arab Peace Initiative, which was adopted by all Arab countries in at the Beirut Summit in 2002. The Initiative calls for Israel's withdrawal from all of the Palestinian territories that have been occupied since 1967, which would guarantee the final status of Palestine and allow the Palestinian people to exercise their rights. It would allow for the creation of an independent State with East Jerusalem as the capital. We call on the international community to implement the relevant resolutions, particularly resolution 2334 (2016) and those resolutions that condemn land-grabbing and settlements and call for an end to Israeli occupation.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Monsigneur Kassas (*spoke in Arabic*): The Holy See commends the presidency of the People's Republic of China for bringing today's topic to the attention of the Security Council and the international community.

Notwithstanding the multiple challenges facing the Middle East today, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process cannot be allowed to slip out of the top priorities of the international community and the Security Council. The Holy See wishes to reiterate its firm support for the two-State solution, which would allow the State of Israel and a Palestinian State to exist side by side in peace within internationally recognized borders. If both Israel and Palestine are to enjoy security, prosperity and peaceful coexistence, there is no alternative to a negotiated settlement leading to a mutually agreed solution directly negotiated between the Israelis and the Palestinians, with the firm and even-handed support of the international community.

For that process to take place and succeed, Israelis and Palestinians must agree on substantial steps to reduce tensions and de-escalate the violence on the ground. Both sides must refrain from actions, including

with regard to settlements, that contradict their stated commitment to a negotiated solution.

The two-State solution will also require all the Palestinian factions to show united political will and work together to address the needs of their people. A united Palestinian front would prove the commitment of the Palestinians to a peacefully negotiated settlement and would be key to the economic prosperity, social cohesion and political stability of a Palestinian State.

The Holy See deeply regrets the loss of life and property in many parts of the Middle East caused by wars and conflicts, particularly in Syria, Yemen and in the northern region of Iraq, where the tragic humanitarian situation calls for renewed commitment by everyone to arrive at a political solution to those conflicts. Pope Francis deeply appreciates the tireless efforts of those who are working to find a political solution to the conflict in Syria. He encourages all actors to work towards a Syrian-led political process leading to a peaceful and inclusive transition, based on the principles of the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex).

Christian communities have existed for more than 2,000 years in the region, and they have peacefully coexisted with other communities. In that context, the Holy See urges the international community, through the Security Council, not to forget those communities. The Holy See believes that the rule of law, including respect for religious freedom and equality before the law, based on the principle of citizenship and regardless of one's race, ethnic origin or religion, is fundamental for the achievement and maintenance of peaceful and fruitful coexistence among individuals, communities and nations.

We must not forget Jerusalem, a city sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims. The historical status quo of the holy sites is a matter of profound sensitivities. The Holy See confirms its position in line with the international community and renews its support for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of the city of Jerusalem. In that regard, the Holy See reiterates the importance of an internationally guaranteed special status in order to ensure the freedom of religion and of conscience of all its inhabitants, as well as secure, free and unhindered access to the holy places by the faithful of all religions and nationalities.

Only last Sunday, during the Angelus prayer in Saint Peter's Square, Pope Francis, who is deeply concerned about the situation in Jerusalem, made a strong appeal for moderation and dialogue, praying that all may be inspired by the resolve to work for reconciliation and peace.

We appeal to the Council to act urgently on its obligations in order to restore hope in the possibility of peace and to make that peace a reality.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Mminele (South Africa): We join other Member States in expressing our appreciation to you, Mr. President, and the Chinese delegation for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestininian question.

South Africa aligns itself with the statement to be made by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

This year marks 50 years of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The vast majority of Palestine's population have lived their entire lifetimes under Israeli occupation. In the past 50 years, civilians have been denied their dignity and fundamental rights to free movement, education, health care and even the right to life. With each passing day, the number of Palestinians in need of humanitarian assistance increases. The situation in Gaza is even more dire. The conclusion in the report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development that the area could be uninhabitable in less than five years if current economic trends were to continue is becoming all the more real.

The Security Council has been seized of the matter of the Middle East, in particular the question of Palestine and Israel, for over 70 years. The people of Palestine continue to look to the United Nations, notably the Security Council, to help them realize their right to self-determination. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has become entrenched over the decades. It is long overdue for the Council to assume its responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations to maintain international peace and security, and to work to reverse the negative trends that threaten peace and the two-State solution. The Security Council must renew its commitment to keep to its mandate and contribute to resolving the conflict.

It has become clear that the conflict between Israel and Palestine feeds into the wider regional dynamics by having a negative effect on peace, economic development, socio-political progress and security throughout the entire region. The Middle East peace process therefore remains one of the central issues shaping international relations within the region and in the world.

South Africa calls for the effective and immediate implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), which reaffirms that Israeli illegal settlements have no legal validity, that they constitute a flagrant violation under international law and that they are a major obstacle to the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security, within internationally recognized borders. We call on Israel to immediately and completely cease all settlement activities, as demanded by the resolution, and remind Israel that no changes to the 1967 lines will be recognized, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the two sides through negotiations.

My delegation is intensely aware that the opportunities for a two-State solution are being eroded The ongoing Israeli settlement activity in the occupied territories is a fundamental obstacle to a return to negotiations and a grave threat to the very existence of a future Palestinian State, as well as to a safe and secure Israel. Every settlement takes land away from Palestinians, who need homes, farmland and other infrastructure.

South Africa has a long-standing record of solidarity with the Palestinian people and supports the Palestinian cause. We firmly believe that the only just solution to the Palestinian question is an independent, sovereign, viable and united Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, functioning within recognized and secure borders and living side by side in peace with Israel and its other neighbours, as endorsed in the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

South Africa is concerned about the arrest and subsequent imprisonment, without charge or trial, of Palestinian Legislative Council member Ms. Khalida Jarrar, who was arrested in Ramallah on 2 July by the occupying Israeli military, and calls for her immediate release. Israel is a signatory of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which stipulates the right to a fair trail and the right of an accused to defend himself or herself. We call on Israel to abide by, and respect the provisions of, the Convention as an occupying force.

South Africa is also deeply concerned about the escalating tensions and violent clashes taking place in and around the Old City of Jerusalem. Given the particular sensitivities surrounding the holy sites in Jerusalem and the need to ensure security, the Quartet have called on all parties to demonstrate maximum restraint, refrain from provocative actions and work towards de-escalating the situation.

We strongly believe that the situation on the ground cannot be allowed to continue unchanged, as it remains an impediment to the security, peace, stability and development of the broader Middle East region. South Africa believes that ending the occupation is in the interests of both Israel and Palestine, and we call on both parties to take concrete steps to that end. The recent past has seen no movement on the peace process. The international community must recommit itself to restart the stalled peace process on the basis of international legality and accountability.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): We would like to begin by congratulating China, a country with which we enjoy friendly relations, on its presidency. We also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, for his efforts in connection with the mandate entrusted to him.

The crisis in the Middle East has been ongoing for 70 years. There is no fair or lasting solution on horizon, and the peace process is at a standstill. The people in our region aspire more than ever to peace and stability. At the same time, they are faced with a new cycle of escalations in violence. The international community should work as quickly as possible to put an end to the violence and to restore hope and faith in the peace process to the people in the region. The entire world must work to bring about peace by countering authoritarianism and extremism.

While the Security Council continues its efforts to address the complicated issues in the Middle East, we must also reinvigorate the peace process. All the parties should demonstrate restraint and respect for

international law in order to create the necessary conditions for a comprehensive, fair and lasting solution.

We recently witnessed the closure of Al-Haram Al-Sharif, which was declared a military zone. The faithful faced numerous obstacles, and that impedes peace and stability and prevents a solution to the Palestinian question. Any attempt to undermine the status quo at Al-Haram Al-Sharif must stop. The State of Qatar has explained its grave concerns to Israel with regard to the closure, for the first time since 1967, of Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

The international community should also shoulder its responsibilities in the face of all of these violations. They are a provocation for the millions of Muslims around the world and only serve the cause of terrorism and fundamentalism around the world.

The escalation in violence must stop. We face an explosive situation. We need to work very seriously to achieve a peaceful solution to the Middle East problem. That would have a positive impact not just for the security of the Palestinians and the Israelis, but also for establishing peace and prosperity in the region as a whole. That would also make it possible to better fight terrorism and extremism.

When we talk about the solution that we want, we mean, of course, the solution that we have all known of for a long time, that is, the two-State solution: a Palestinian State and an Israeli State living side by side in peace, in respect of the right of Palestine to create an independent State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and in strict respect of Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The State of Qatar has spared no effort to find a fair and lasting solution. We have made significant efforts in political and humanitarian terms to create the necessary and useful conditions that would allow for progress in the peace process. Within that framework, we have supported inter-Palestinian dialogue. In addition, we have worked in coordination with the United Nations because we know that this can have a very positive impact for the achievement of peace.

The suffering of the Syrian people continues. The Syrian people are paying a high price for the situation in the country. We have not been able to achieve peace thus far, and the Security Council resolutions on Syria have not yet been implemented. The State of Qatar will continue its efforts with various stakeholders and its international partners. Let us use all of the necessary resources to provide all of the aid that we can to the brotherly Syrian people.

The State of Qatar is facing unilateral measures from certain parties in the region. We will continue our efforts in strict compliance with the principles of good-neighbourliness, and we will do everything within our power to strengthen peace and stability in the region and around the world. We are working within the United Nations and also bilaterally to fight terrorism.

We are pleased to see that the Emir of the State of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, continues his mediation efforts to provide his support in the ongoing crisis. We remain hopeful that all of the crises in our region will be resolved in the framework of international law.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the Vice-Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the excellent manner in which you are conducting the work of the Security Council this month, and to thank you for your presence throughout this debate. It demonstrates your own interest, as well as that of your country, in the subject under discussion.

In recent weeks, tensions in the holy city of Jerusalem, caused by the closure of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the imposition by Israel, following an incident, of restrictions on the faithful, was another demonstration of how easily the situation can escalate and approach the point of no return.

The Committee aligns itself with other statements made today reiterating the call to respect the sanctity of these sites and the right to worship there. The Committee regrets all loss of human life. In its joint communiqué with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation of 21 July, the Committee called on the international community to urgently reaffirm respect for the historic status quo and to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to rescind all measures that violate this status quo, including the installation of metal detectors, and to fulfil its obligations under international law. The restoration of the status quo at religious sites must be accompanied by urgent efforts to end the Israeli occupation of the State of Palestine.

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the 1967 war and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. The question of Palestine continues to be the topic on the United Nations agenda that goes back the furthest in time, and the Israeli occupation is the longest lasting occupation in contemporary history. As the Committee has repeatedly pointed out, this is an unacceptable and unsustainable situation that must end immediately.

Faced with the five decades of continuous occupation, and in order to consider concrete ways to end it, the Committee has been holding events throughout 2017. Last month, on 29 and 30 June, we organized here at Headquarters the United Nations Forum to Mark Fifty Years of Occupation, which was opened by the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ms. Amina Mohammed, who delivered a message from the Secretary-General. The Forum was attended by experts, politicians, civil society representatives from Israel, Palestine and other countries, as well as by a Nobel Prize winner. The Forum served as a platform, without a doubt, for deliberations that were perhaps more ground-breaking, balanced and far-reaching than any that have taken place in a long time under the auspices of the United Nations on the question of Palestine.

While the views expressed were diverse, there was a clear consensus among the participants: the occupation is illegal, must end and must end now. I urge the Council to study the report of that Forum, which will be published in early August. It contains thought-provoking observations and recommendations, including on the need for the international community to redouble its efforts to achieve a viable and just solution, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, as well as on the need for States to distinguish, in their relations, between the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. In addition, with regard to the situation in Gaza, the participants called for a shift from a humanitarian focus to a political and human rights focus that takes into account the legal obligations of all parties.

The Committee has continued to fulfil other aspects of its mandate in support of Palestinian aspirations to statehood and sovereignty, including promoting capacity-building for Palestinian civil servants. For example, the Committee organized a capacity-building workshop in Beirut in April on the theme "Goal 17 for Palestine: South-South and Triangular Partnerships for Sustainable Development". The workshop promoted a common understanding of the practice of South-South and triangular cooperation as an important modality for the achievement of sustainable development objectives in Palestine and provided participants with practical tools to understand the inherent challenges and opportunities.

Last week, on 20 and 21 July, in Baku, the Committee organized an international conference on the question of Jerusalem, with the support of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The conference provided an opportunity to discuss ways in which the international community could raise economic, practical and concrete support for the Palestinian population of East Jerusalem. The issue of current tensions was also discussed at the conference.

The Committee has repeatedly stressed the illegality of the blockade on the Gaza Strip, which is now in its tenth year. That blockade amounts to collective punishment and has resulted in one of the worst humanitarian crises, exemplified by the current electricity outages, the shortage of doctors and medicine, water and all of the consequences thereof.

Moreover, the Committee has repeatedly spoken out about the illegality of Israel's settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which remain a major obstacle to achieving peace and a serious violation of international law. Paragraph 2 of resolution 2334 (2016) expressly calls on Israel to

> "immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem".

Regrettably, the recent announcement by the Israeli Government concerning an additional 4,000 dwellings reveals a total lack of respect for the Council's demands and a total lack of accountability or progress in the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016).

The momentum generated by the resolution must not be squandered, and the Council must fully utilize its accountability mechanisms to ensure the full implementation of its resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), which in paragraph 12

> "[r]equests the Secretary-General to report to the Council every three months on the implementation of the provisions of the... resolution".

While the two informative briefings to date have highlighted what has been common knowledge for many years — namely, Israel's ongoing flagrant violations of international law — by way of oral statements, the Committee calls on the Secretary-General to issue written reports in the future and provide practical recommendations to ensure Israel's accountability.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): To begin with I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on China's accession to the presidency of the Security Council for the month, which has been distinguished, as is customary, by outstanding wisdom and responsibility.

We are a main stakeholder of the agenda item under consideration, as Israel has occupied the Syrian Golan since 1967. I therefore speak as a principal party in restating the position of the Syrian Arab Republic. It is a principled position in favour of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination; an independent State across the whole of its national territory, with East Jerusalem as its capital; and the guaranteed return of refugees to their country under the relevant Security Council resolutions. Those non-negotiable rights cannot be subject to concessions or statutes of limitation, or impeded by force.

The holy esplanade of Jerusalem is under occupation and exploited by the Israeli occupying forces. Given the onoing situation around the holy sites, the Security Council must more than ever do more than merely express it condemnation and concern. The Council must fully assume its responsibility to ensure the immediate implementation of all of its resolutions relevant to ending the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories, including resolution 2334 (2016), on the illegitimacy of the Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem.

With respect to Mr. Mladenov's briefing to the Council today, in our view nothing justifies the fact that he insisted on ignoring the nature of his mission and mandate as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. In an unacceptable, unprofessional and immoral manner, Mr. Mladenov failed to mention the illegal Israeli activities in the Syrian Golan. He did not underscore the United Nations position on the Israeli occupation since 5 June 1967, despite a dozen resolutions adopted by our international Organization, in particular the Security Council, on that very subject.

As a result of the racist and terrible Israeli occupation that has endured for more than half a century, the Syrian citizens in the occupied Syrian Golan remain subject to the worst crimes under the oppressive policies of racial discrimination, detention, torture and other procedures. They are deprived of their natural resources. They are deprived of their right to study under the Syrian national curriculum. They are deprived of their right to a Syrian identity card. They are deprived of their right to access national Syrian hospitals in their villages in the occupied Syrian Golan. That situation, including the occupation and confiscation of land and property, has persisted for more than half a century.

The Special Coordinator ignored the fact that Israel is supporting armed terrorist groups in the occupied Syrian Golan. He did not address that issue at all. In addition, in a highly partial and unprofessional manner, Mr. Mladenov decided, as we heard this morning, to justify the attacks of the Israeli occupying forces on the Syrian army. I would remind Mr. Mladenov that we are talking here about Syrian territory occupied by Israel. The Israeli army provides logistical support to the terrorist groups in those territories. Whenever we gain a victory, we are attacked by the terrorist groups. The Israeli air force has targeted Syrian bases that are situated far from the occupied Syrian Golan.

Will Mr. Mladenov continue to justify Israel's actions and the fact that Israel is targeting Syrian army bases, which are themselves combatting terrorism? Mr. Mladenov should indicate his concern about the fact that the United Nations is refusing to assume its responsibilities. He should discuss the statement made at the conference between the Presidents of the Russian Federation and the United States of America. For the record and for history, I call on the Special Representative to consider the well-documented reports of Ms. Dilyana Gaytandjieva, a Bulgarian national, and the articles published in a Bulgarian newspaper on the activities of terrorist groups in Syria and the transfer of weapons from Bulgaria to Jeddah, including on ships registered to certain Member States. All of this is being financed by certain Gulf States. I will return to that issue in detail when we discuss counter-terrorism in another meeting.

It also would seem that the Special Coordinator has not heard of the illegal decision of the Israeli occupying forces to hold local council elections in villages in the occupied Syrian Golan. They called this an Israeli law, but in fact it is a flagrant violation of our Charter and

of United Nations resolutions as well as international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, and the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 497 (1981), adopted unanimously on 17 December 1981. That resolution rejects Israel's annexation of the occupied Syrian Golan and finds all Israeli activity in the occupied Syrian Golan null and void from the perspective of international law.

My country, the Syrian Arab Republic, categorically rejects this new Israeli resolution. We reiterate that the Golan will remain an integral part of Syrian territory and that it will be reintegrated with the motherland. We also reiterate that we have sovereign authority over the occupied Syrian Golan within the 4 June 1967 borders. This is a non-negotiable right on which there can be no concessions. These are our territories; they are occupied now, but we will get them back. The Israeli settlers will leave, sooner or later.

In that respect, my Government calls on the Security Council to bring pressure to bear on Israel to ensure the immediate liberation of Syrian prisoners, in particular Sedqi al-Maqt, the Nelson Mandela of Syria, who served a 27-year sentence in the occupying Power's prisons. He was sentenced a few days ago to another 14 years because he had dared to expose the occupying Power's practice of providing logistical support to armed terrorist groups in southern Syria and in the separation zone.

My country, Syria, believes that today the Security Council must shoulder its historical responsibility to correct this injustice. We are meeting today and have met on other occasions with the goal of putting an end to the loathsome Israeli occupation, not of holding discussions on issues far removed from the item on our agenda.

I would recall that Israel has long occupied territory and carried out massacres. It is the only party in the Middle East to have an arsenal of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. Do not forget the terrorist war and the unprecedented destruction it has wrought in the Middle East. Indeed, certain parties in the Security Council are trying to avoid working to end the appalling Israeli occupation and are providing cover for it.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Costa Rica.

Mr. Castro Cordoba (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): We congratulate you, Sir, and the Mission of the People's Republic of China on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of July.

Millions of human beings live daily in anguish, despair and pain as a result of armed conflict. Costa Rica deeply deplores the increase in conflicts in the Middle East. The situation has deteriorated in recent years, and it has not been possible to achieve peace and security in the region. It is urgent that we put an end to the humanitarian crisis we are facing and seek a political solution, as this crisis has become a humanitarian tragedy of shocking proportions and represents an affront to all of humankind. We therefore appeal once again to the Security Council to fully exercise its mandate to maintain international peace and security, as clearly set out in the Charter of the United Nations.

With respect to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Costa Rica reiterates the urgent need to resume negotiations between the parties on the central issues of the conflict, which remain to this day, on the basis of previous obligations undertaken and agreements reached. My country condemns the escalation of recent tensions and the clashes that have resulted in casualties in and around the holy city of Jerusalem, and urges the parties to show the utmost restraint and refrain from any unilateral action that could worsen the already volatile situation.

It is crucial that a political solution to this conflict be found it and that we create, as soon as possible, a new peace architecture that would make it possible to resolve differences and lead to the achievement of the objective agreed by the international community, that is, harmonious coexistence between an independent Palestinian State and the State of Israel.

June marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. That is 50 years of having failed, as an international community, to come together to find a solution to one of the most widely discussed conflicts since the establishment of the Organization. It is a failure of our multilateral system, in which international law must prevail as a central pillar. We cannot continue to overlook the pain of the millions of people who are victims of this political and military struggle. That is why I urge that we do our job and ensure that multilateralism prevails so as to promote solidarity and fulfil the commitment to achieve the

goals of the entire international community, not simply those of a group of nations. The United Nations must play its role as the epicentre of global governance on the basis of respect for the collective quest for solutions.

Costa Rica deems it urgent to find a political solution to this conflict. We must work on establishing a new peace architecture so that we can resolve differences and implement preventive diplomacy, with a view to holding negotiations leading to tangible, lasting and sustainable results. Military options are not solutions. War cannot be fought with more war. Peace is not built by fuelling conflicts with arms and bombings. Peace must be built using the tools provided us by diplomacy and multilateralism in order to put an end to this humanitarian tragedy.

We believe that we must without delay work to investigate and bring to justice those responsible for the most serious crimes, with a view to putting an end to all actions leading to the deaths of innocents, delivering justice and preventing suffering and the deaths of even more innocent civilians. The only thing worse than this human tragedy is the fact that it results in impunity rather than justice.

Costa Rica reiterates its concern over the growing tensions in the conflict in the Middle East and strongly urges the international community to achieve peace in that region, and specifically all permanent members of the Council to commit, in accordance with the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group code of conduct, to not using the veto in case of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. We urge the Council to act expeditiously and decisively to ensure the protection of civilians.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Mayong Onon (Malaysia): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening and presiding over today's meeting. My delegation is grateful to the Special Coordinator, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his important briefing and reflections.

Malaysia associates itself with the statements to be delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and by the representative of Uzbekistan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Malaysia deplores the violent clashes between the Israeli security forces and Palestinians on 21 July in the West Bank, which left three Palestinians dead and injured many others. Those clashes in the West Bank further complicate the already volatile situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. We call on all parties to refrain from actions that could further escalate tensions in Jerusalem's old city.

We condemn in the strongest terms the closure of the Al-Aqsa Mosque on 14 July by the Israeli authorities. We join other member States in demanding that Israel refrain from any action that would alter the status of the Islamic holy site. We reiterate our call for Israel to provide unrestricted access for Muslim worshippers to the Al-Aqsa Mosque. We also urge Israel to cease any action that can have the effect of changing the status quo of the Islamic holy sites. The sanctity of the religious sites must be respected. In that regard, we also commend and support the efforts of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and custodian of the holy sites of Jerusalem to restore calm in the holy city.

We are extremely disheartened to learn of the plans announced by Israel to increase the development of housing units in East Jerusalem to a rate of over 30 per cent more than in 2016, as highlighted by Mr. Mladenov earlier today. That is a clear violation of resolution 2334 (2016). We recall the pronouncement by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian people, asking for the quarterly report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) to be produced in writing. The report must outline where the parties were in compliance. In cases of non-compliance, concrete measures must be detailed to ensure the full and effective implementation and enforcement of the resolution.

We continue to look forward to seeing a written report on the implementation of the resolution. Let us make good on the historic Council action that reflected the urgency and conviction to reverse the negative trends that threaten the peace and viability of the two-State solution. We must now focus on the implementation of existing resolutions, including on settlements, as well as on all acts of violence against civilians and further incitements.

Being detached and apathetic to the developments in the occupied Palestinian territory is no longer an option. In that regard, Malaysia welcomes the positive initiative undertaken by the United States in facilitating a water-supply arrangement between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government for Palestinians in the West

Bank and Gaza, the respected United Nations and Egyptian initiative to facilitate the provision of fuel for the supply of electricity and the concrete commitments made by Qatar on reconstruction in Gaza.

As we mark 50 years of the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestine, the international community owes it to the Palestinian people to mobilize its political will and explore other peaceful, legal and diplomatic avenues available to us to end the longest-running occupation in modern history. Let us not be condemned by history by virtue of being a by-stander.

Finally, Malaysia remains committed to playing a constructive role to realize the two-State solution. We reiterate our long-standing support for the inalienable rights of self-determination for the Palestinian people and a just, comprehensive and final solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Bin Momen (Bangladesh): We convey our appreciation to the Chinese presidency for convening today's open debate.

Bangladesh aligns itself with the statements to be made by the representatives of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, and of Uzbekistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

We thank the Secretary-General's Special Representative for his comprehensive oral report, pursuant to resolution 2234 (2016), and would like to join other delegations in underlining the need for a written report.

We express our deep concern about the escalation of tension surrounding the illegal closing of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem and impeded access to the mosque by Muslim worshippers. We share the views of the Special Representative that the situation surrounding the mosque can have potential catastrophic costs well beyond the walls of the old city, and stress the need for respecting and maintaining the historic status quo at the holy sites, with the freedom to worship guaranteed for all concerned.

In this fiftieth year of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian and Arab territories, the Security Council must demonstrate its resolve to address the Palestinian question as a matter of urgency. The continued breaches of international humanitarian law and systematic human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territories have given rise to an egregious culture of impunity. In the absence of any effective international accountability, the occupying Power continues killing Palestinian citizens, including youth and children, imprisoning and abusing scores of Palestinians in its detention centres and dispossessing and displacing thousands of Palestinian families through its construction and expansion of illegal settlements.

We share concerns about the recent Israeli decision to construct 1,800 illegal settlement units in occupied East Jerusalem, which would lead to the further eviction of Palestinian civilians, in flagrant violation of resolution 2234 (2016). It is obvious that the settlements, as well as the wall in and around occupied East Jerusalem, are being deliberately pursued in order to fundamentally change the character, status and demography of the occupied Palestinian territories.

The Council has a moral obligation to prevail upon Israel to immediately halt its illegal settlement regime in the occupied Palestinian territories, lift the blockade in the Gaza Strip and put an end to all forms of occupation. Immediate priority must be given to ensuring international protection for the Palestinian people suffering for decades from Israel's policy of collective punishment. The hunger strike recently observed by thousands of prisoners in Israeli detention centres underscores the need for the international community's sustained efforts to address their grievances and plight.

Under the guidance of our honourable Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, the Government and people of Bangladesh remain steadfast in our support for the just and legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent, viable, contiguous and sovereign Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in the framework of a two-State solution.

We continue to urge all key actors to remain seized of their efforts to pursue a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question, consistent with the relevant Security Council resolutions, and in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet road map and the principle of land for peace. We also add our voice to the need to ensure enhanced, predictable and sustainable funding for the United Nations Relief and Works

Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in order for it to effectively carry out its humanitarian mandate in support of the Palestinian refugees.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month. I would also like to thank you for having convened today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

I would like to commend your friendly country on its call to ease the suffering of the Palestinian people and empower them to enjoy their rights and establish the sovereign State of Palestine based on 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. I also thank you for the support that you personally represent in that regard.

The past few days have seen the opening of a new chapter of violence in Jerusalem and the occupied Palestinian territories. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia firmly condemns all the illegal steps taken by the Israeli occupying authorities in Jerusalem and Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Jerusalem endured for more than 1,000 years under Arab Muslim rule, during which the sanctuaries of Judaism, Christianity and Islam were respected and protected, as were the worshippers in holy areas. During the half-century of the Israeli occupation, the Al-Aqsa Mosque was deliberately set on fire in 1969, and worshippers in the Abrahamic sanctuary were massacred by the terrorist settler Baruch Goldstein, who was glorified by the people and Government of Israel after his death.

The terrorist settlers have not stopped plotting, devising provocations and calling publicly for the demolition of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the exclusion and expulsion of Muslims from Jerusalem, in coordination and cooperation with the Israeli occupation authorities. Today we continue to watch in pain as the Israeli occupying authorities have besieged Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, prevented worshippers from performing their religious rites and reacted with barbarity to peaceful protests. One such scene has been documented, in which we saw an Israeli soldier on our television screens kicking a Muslim worshipper as he prayed. Has anyone here seen a worse demonstration of disregard and contempt for a religion and the practice of its rites? An act of such shamelessness is an expression of the doctrine of the Israeli occupation, its oppression of the unarmed Palestinian people and its deliberate policy of insulting, humiliating and terrorizing them.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia firmly condemns all terrorist acts, regardless of the identities of the perpetrators or their victims. We condemn all States, organizations and individuals who practice, ignore or help to finance or incite terrorism. We believe there can be no justification or excuse for terrorist acts.

It is disturbing that the Security Council has not taken measures to express anger at the acts of the Israeli occupying Power, and we urge it to uphold its responsibilities and to put a stop to Israel's continued anti-Palestinian practices. We reiterate our firm position of support to the Palestinian people and rejection of any attempts to impose control and unilateral measures designed to show contempt for Jerusalem and Al-Haram Al-Sharif. We also want to warn the world about the danger of the situation's exacerbation and escalation, which would have an impact on the entire region and beyond. My delegation has warned the Council several times that the most dangerous aspects of the conflict in Palestine are Israel's provocations and plans aimed at changing Jerusalem's historical status, Judaizing the city, altering its demographics, distorting its Arab Muslim identity and disrespecting all its holy Muslim and Christian sites. Saudi Arabia rejects any attempt to harm Jerusalem's status and calls on all States to commit to the relevant international resolutions in that regard.

My delegation affirms that the only path to peace is through a return to the Arab Peace Initiative and to the development of an effective mechanism guaranteeing the Palestinian people's enjoyment of their inalienable rights. The occupation must be ended in accordance with a specific timeline, establishing an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital within the June 1967 borders; ensuring Israel's withdrawal from all the occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan and the Lebanese Sheba'a farms; ending the construction of illegal settlements on Palestinian lands and removing existing ones; and reversing all the unilateral measures that have been undertaken by the occupying Power in Jerusalem.

With regard to Syria, Saudi Arabia welcomes the agreement reached between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the United States of America and the Russian Federation on a ceasefire in south-western Syria. We hope that no-fly zones will be established in Syria

in order to guarantee civilians' safety and protection from the barbarities of the Syrian regime and its allies, particularly in view of the fact that we continue to witness the Syrian regime violating every truce agreement and massacring, murdering, terrorizing and displacing its people with the assistance of Iran's Revolutionary Guard and terrorist sectarian militias led by Hizbullah.

We should emphasize that a lack of accountability is one of the most important reasons behind the continuing criminal acts of the Syrian authorities and their allies. We therefore reiterate that the international community should continue to take a firm stand against all acts of killing, siege, deliberate starvation, displacement and ethnic cleansing, which have provided a golden opportunity for Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and others to expand in the absence of an authority. Saudi Arabia once again affirms its willingness to participate in any joint international effort to eradicate such terrorist organizations, wherever they may be found.

We believe that the Syrian people's struggle and aspirations for freedom and dignity are destined to be victorious, even if that may be somewhere down the road. Peace and justice are two sides of the same coin, and the security and stability of our region and indeed the entire world require that they go hand in hand. We therefore call for the immediate and essential implementation of the first Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), including the formation of a transitional authority with the executive power to establish a future Syria big enough for all its citizens, a Syria that denounces terrorism and violence and stands above discrimination and extremism.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mrs. Rodríguez Camejo (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, Sir, allow me to congratulate you for your leadership of the Security Council during the month of July. We express our appreciation for the holding of this open debate.

We support the statement made by the delegation of Nicaragua on behalf of Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian people and the statement to be made by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Cuba expresses its deep concern about the situation in the Middle East, which is plagued by violence, interference in its internal affairs, foreign aggression and long-term conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is time to settle the historic debt owed to the State of Palestine and restore the inalienable rights of its people, which have been violated by Israel during half a century of occupation, repression, collective punishment, destruction and confiscation of Palestinian land and property, forced displacement and settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. We are compelled to recall what our Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro Ruz, Leader of the Cuban Revolution, said on 12 October 1979 here at the United Nations:

> "Pushed off their land, expelled from their own country, scattered throughout the world, persecuted and murdered, the heroic Palestinians are a vivid example of sacrifice and patriotism, living symbols of the most terrible crime of our era." (*A/34/PV.31, para. 24*)

The Security Council must take concrete steps to end that historic injustice by urgently ending Israel's occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories dating back to 1967. The approximately decade-long blockade of the Gaza Strip, which has led to a profound socioeconomic and humanitarian crisis affecting 2 million Palestinian civilians, must be halted immediately, and obligations under international humanitarian law must be fulfilled.

A two-State solution and a comprehensive, just, peaceful and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question will not be possible as long as Israel continues to violate its obligations under international law and the Charter of the United Nations in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, as well as the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016).

Cuba also demands the end of the occupation of the Syrian Golan. We reiterate that any steps or actions taken, or to be taken, so as to change the legal, physical and demographic status and institutional structure of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as Israel's measures to exercise its jurisdiction and administration in that territory, constitute violations of international law, international agreements, the Charter and the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 497

(1981) and the Fourth Geneva Convention, as well as an act of defiance of the international community.

Cuba takes note of the initiatives to resume direct peace negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis and the recently concluded agreement with regard to supplying water to Palestinian territories. Cuba will continue to defend the right of the Palestinians to self-determination; a free, independent and sovereign State, with its capital in East Jerusalem, within the pre-1967 borders; and the return of Palestinian refugees. We will also continue to support the entry of Palestine as a full-fledged Member of the United Nations. We hope that, in the context of the fiftieth anniversary of the Israeli occupation and the tenth anniversary of the blockade of the Gaza Strip, the Security Council will live up to its responsibility and fulfil its debt to the Palestinian people.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Uzbekistan.

Mr. Ibragimov (Uzbekistan): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of States members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in my capacity as Chair of the OIC group.

This meeting is taking place in a climate overburdened by an increasingly unstable and volatile situation in the Middle East, with the unresolved and festering question of Palestine remaining at the heart of unrest in the region. The OIC is very concerned about the contempt shown by Israel, the occupying Power, towards the Security Council's authoritative decisions and demands, in contravention of international law and in total obstruction of a political horizon for a peaceful solution. In this fiftieth year of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab lands since 1967, the urgency for a peaceful solution remains as pressing as ever and requires serious and immediate efforts.

The OIC expresses its serious concern with regard to the ongoing developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and condemns all of the illegal policies and measures being implemented by Israel, the occupying Power, aimed at altering the status, character and demography of the territory, including the Arab, Islamic and Palestinian character and identity of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The OIC condemns Israel's illegal action of closing the Mosque and further impeding the access of Muslim worshippers to the Mosque. The OIC urges the Council to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to ensure the freedom of worship for Palestinians, including in occupied East Jerusalem; refrain from interfering in the affairs of the Islamic and Christian holy sites; respect the historic status quo at Al-Haram Al-Sharif; and act in compliance with its obligations under international law as the occupying Power. In that regard, the OIC reiterates its firm commitment to the rights of the Palestinian people in occupied East Jerusalem, which forms an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967.

At the same time, the OIC reiterates its condemnation of the continuation and escalation of Israel's illegal measures and policies aimed at expanding its illegal colonial settlements and further entrenching its five-decades-long colonization of Palestinian land. The OIC condemns in particular the recent Israeli decision to build more than 1,800 illegal settlement units in occupied East Jerusalem, which will in effect lead to the confiscation of Palestinian land and the forced eviction and dispossession of more Palestinian civilians. In that connection, the OIC reaffirms that the continuation of the Israeli settlement policy will undermine the territorial integrity, viability and contiguity of a future Palestinian State, notwithstanding the fact that settlement activities are illegal acts constituting flagrant violations of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, including,in particular resolution 2334 (2016), which unequivocally demands an end to all such activities.

The Council must act to uphold its responsibilities to end Israeli settlement activities, which have been manifestly and deliberately stepped up in the occupied Palestinian territory, especially in and around East Jerusalem. While the OIC welcomes the second report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), as orally delivered to the Security Council by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (see S/PV.7977), we call once again for the submission of a meaningful written report so as to ensure the proper documentation of the implementation of the resolution's provisions, given Israel's continued flagrant disrespect of the Council and its resolutions. We further appeal to the international community for its sustained engagement, as also called for by resolution 2334 (2016), and its full support at this critical period for sponsorship to a timed, multilateral political process that would lead to the enforcement of the relevant United Nations resolutions aimed at finally ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land since

1967, achieving the internationally recognized two-State solution and the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people — the objectives to which the OIC remains unflinchingly committed.

The OIC further reminds the Council of its duties with regard to Israel's condemnable systematic violations of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, including deliberately killing and injuring civilians and peaceful protesters; violent military attacks against the civilian population; the detention of thousands of Palestinian civilians; the confiscation of land and property; the demolition of Palestinian homes; and the forced displacement of Palestinians; as well as terrorism perpetrated by settlers against Palestinian civilians. All such actions continue to raise tensions and sensitivities and are severely aggravating the fragile situation on the ground, with the potential to spark grave consequences. The Security Council must demand that all such illegal acts cease and that Israel, the occupying Power, abide by its obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, and all the relevant United Nations resolutions on the question of Palestine.

The OIC group remains firm in its conviction that the Security Council must not be absolved of its role in that regard. It should act to ensure that the Palestinian people realize their right to self-determination, sovereignty and independence in their State of Palestine in the territory occupied since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and that a just solution emerges for the plight of Palestinian refugees, in line with United Nations resolutions and international law.

I must also reiterate the concerns of the OIC regarding the grave humanitarian suffering that the Palestinian people is enduring throughout occupied Palestine. The situation in the Gaza Strip remains particularly grave and alarming, as the Palestinian civilian population there continues to suffer from decades of occupation and the impact of military aggression, compounded by the inhumane, illegal Israeli blockade, now in its tenth year. We reiterate the call for an end to this massive form of collective punishment of the Palestinian people and for urgent efforts to reconstruct, rehabilitate and revive Gaza, which also remains an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967.

Today we must also reiterate the call for attention to the plight of Palestinian political prisoners and detainees in Israeli detention centres. We call for respect of their rights, in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention and international human rights law, and for an end to their abuse and captivity by the occupying Power. The hunger strike recently undertaken by thousands of prisoners is a cry for attention to their critical plight and for action to resolve it. In that regard, we appeal for international compassion and responsibility.

Lastly, the OIC encourages all States Members of the United Nations to intensify their ongoing efforts aimed at overcoming the continuing financial shortfalls of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, with a view to ensuring adequate, sufficient, predictable and sustained funding for the Agency for the duration of its mandate, pending a solution. In that way, it can fully meet the needs of the Palestine refugees at this critical time and continue to carry out its indispensable humanitarian mission and its stabilizing role amid the heightened needs and volatility in the region.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that the conflicts in the Middle East — including the tragedy of the Palestine question and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with the occupation now in its fiftieth year — and what seems to be chronic divisions within the Security Council have allowed such menaces as violent extremism and terrorism to flourish in the region and reach the proportions we must confront today as we collectively grapple with the elusive search for viable solutions. Therefore, the multifaceted dimension and root causes of the region's conflicts must be addressed, without exception, in the context of international law, including humanitarian law and human rights law, and with adherence to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the guarantor of peace and security in the Middle East and globally.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Atlassi (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on China's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of July. I also thank you, Sir, for taking the initiative in organizing this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We also thank Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing this morning.

Events in the region and internationally have an impact on the Palestinian question. While the peace process has been paralysed in political terms since 2014, Israel has continued to take unilateral measures in expanding its settlements in an unprecedented fashion on the Palestinian territory that has been occupied since June 1967. Unprecedented violence in the region is dashing Palestinian hope. They have the feeling that the international community has abandoned them to turn to other issues. It is certainly true that other questions are no less important, but they should not lead us to forget the Palestinian question. It remains the main crisis in the Middle East.

In political terms, the years we are living through are very difficult ones when compared to previous years. We see that the occupation has continued for 50 years in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, while settlements, colonialization and Judaization continue. Those policies cannot lead to peace. That is why the international community should assume its responsibilities and encourage the parties to return to the negotiating table to kick-start the peace process on the basis of the two-State solution, a solution that is currently under threat more than ever before. The current situation will lead only to violence and chaos.

We appreciate and are optimistic about the determination of the new American Administration to encourage dialogue between the parties to achieve the two-State solution. Were the situation to remain bleak, it would go against the interests of the parties. I repeat that that will only fan the flames and cause the violence to increase. In that regard, my country supports all attempts to restart the peace process on the basis of a precise time frame decided upon by the parties, as well as on the basis of the two-State solution within the borders of 4 June 1067, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian State.

There can be no doubt that Jerusalem has a very special place not only in the hearts of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but also for worshippers of the three monotheistic Abrahamic religions. That is why coexistence needs to be maintained in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the city that Muslims turn to before Mecca, and it is the third holy city, after Mecca and Medina, for more than 1.5 billion Muslims. That is why any attempt to alter the legal status of Jerusalem will lead only to an increase in violence and hatred. That would encourage a number of young people to turn to terrorism. The King of Morocco Chairs the Al-Quds Committee at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and, in that regard, we call for the rights of the Palestinian people to be respected, in particular their right to create a State with East Jerusalem as its capital. That is the only way that we can achieve a fair and sustainable peace in the Middle East, and that would allow us to strengthen international peace and security.

His Majesty King Mohamed VI has on a number of occasions, including at multilateral and bilateral meetings, called for an end to settlements, as does resolution 2334 (2016). His Majesty has also warned against the Judaization of Jerusalem and any attempt to change the legal status of the city. He said the same in a statement to the press, and the Security Council itself also raised the issue in a statement issued on 17 September 2015 (SC/12052). His Majesty the King of Morocco has called for every step to be taken to allow the Palestinian people to create a State with East Jerusalem as its capital within the 1967 borders, living side by side in peace with Israel. Morocco's position on the Arab Peace Initiative therefore remains unchanged, which we support. We also call for the creation of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the 1967 borders. Morocco stands ready to participate actively in all initiatives that allow for progress on the peace process and the achievement of peace, security and stability in the region.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, Mr. President, we are pleased to see you presiding over the Security Council during the month of July. We congratulate you, Sir, and your country's delegation on the manner in which you have been guiding the business of the Council this month, and in particular for convening this open debate on such an important issue for international peace and stability.

It is an honour for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to take the floor on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries at today's quarterly open debate on a subject to which we have historically attached particular importance, namely, "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question". First of all, we would like to convey our appreciation to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Special Coordinator of the

United Nations for the Middle East Peace Process, for his valuable briefing this morning.

During the seventeenth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in September 2016 in Margarita Island, Venezuela, the Heads of State and Government reaffirmed their continued solidarity with the Palestinian people, as well as their unbreakable support for their just cause, all while calling on the member States of the Movement to renew their commitment and to strengthen and further coordinate their efforts to promote the realization of justice and the rights of the Palestinian people in the light of the critical situation that continues to prevail and the ever-diminishing prospects for a peaceful solution.

That was also the case almost a month ago when, on 27 May, the Ministerial Committee of the Non-Aligned Movement on Palestine issued a political declaration of support and solidarity with the Palestinian people to solemnly commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and other Arab countries in 1967. The declaration also sought to reflect upon other upcoming solemn anniversaries, including the seventieth anniversary of the General Assembly's decision to split Mandated Palestine by adopting resolution 181 (II) in 1947, as well as the seventieth anniversary of the Al-Nakba, which the heroic Palestinian people have resisted.

In that regard, we emphasize that a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects remains a priority on the agenda of the Movement. In addition, we reaffirm that the ongoing Israeli occupation and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a whole continue to pose a serious threat to international peace and security that requires attention and an urgent solution, in accordance with international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and, of course, the Charter of the United Nations itself. In that regard, the Movement stands ready to contribute to the achievement of a just, lasting and peaceful solution. We call for increased international and regional efforts to support that goal, all while recalling the responsibilities of the Security Council and the General Assembly on the matter, including responsibilities that were recently reaffirmed in resolution 2334 (2016), which was welcomed and endorsed by the Movement in its communiqué dated 27 December 2016. We believe that the resolution offers the most viable path to peace and establishes the requisites and parameters for a just solution that would safeguard the two-State solution, based on pre-1967 borders. We believe it would create the necessary conditions to end the occupation, fairly resolve the conflict in all its aspects and make Palestinian-Israeli peace and security a reality.

The member States of the Movement reiterate their calls for full respect and implementation of the resolution. We stress that that remains essential in order to remedy the situation on the ground, remove tensions and foster an appropriate environment for the search for peace. In that regard, we welcome the Secretary-General's second report on the implementation of that resolution, which was orally presented to the Security Council by Mr. Mladenov (see S/PV.7977). However, we reiterate the need for a substantive written report to be submitted in order to support the Council's functions and ensure adequate documentation of the implementation of the provisions of the resolution, especially in the light of continued disregard on the part of Israel concerning the Security Council and its violations of the Council's resolutions.

The Movement expresses its deep concern about recent developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, in particular with respect to the continuation and escalation of illegal policies and measures by Israel, the occupying Power, which are aimed at expanding its illegal settlement campaign, continuing the consolidation of its occupation and half-century invasion of Palestinian lands and continuing with its violation of the rights of the Palestinian people. In that regard, it is worth mentioning the most recent issuing by the Israeli occupying authorities of permits for the construction of more than 1,800 units of illegal settlements in East Jerusalem, as well as the fact that those policies continue irrespective of the fact that they will result in the eviction and expropriation of more Palestinian property, including the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood.

Instead of ending its violations, reversing their negative tendencies on the ground and demonstrating its commitment to the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, as required by the Security Council and the international community, Israel continues to act in contempt of the Council and in violation of its legal obligations.

In that regard, the Movement's member States strongly condemn the recent provocative decisions by Israel, the occupying Power, to carry out its settlement activities, which are in grave violation

of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). We are also alarmed and deeply deplore the blatant contempt of Israel, the occupying Power, for the unequivocal decision of the Security Council in that respect, which clearly reaffirmed that Israeli settlement activities are not legally valid and constitute a flagrant violation of international law. The Movement calls on Israel to immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem, and to fully respect all of its legal obligations, including those stipulated in the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. The Movement also recalls the call of the Security Council to end all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, as well as acts of provocation, incitement and destruction.

With regard to Gaza, the situation remains of great concern to the Movement, particularly with respect to the deteriorating humanitarian situation, which will by untenable by 2020, according to United Nations officials in the field. In fact, according to the latest report by the United Nations country team, most projections for 2020 have deteriorated further and faster than expected. In that sense, the continued obstruction of the reconstruction of homes, property and civil infrastructure destroyed by the Israeli aggression of 2014, as well as the extremely slow pace of Gaza's recovery due to Israel's current illegal blockade, have forced thousands of families to remain displaced and homeless. That has also prevented the reconstruction of critical infrastructure, including that related to the electricity supply, which has resulted in serious repercussions on humanitarian, socioeconomic, psychological and environmental conditions. In that regard, we reiterate our call for a complete lifting of the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, which has lasted for more than 10 years. We simultaneously emphasize that the Gaza crisis must be tackled in a comprehensive manner, in accordance with international law, including the relevant international humanitarian law and human rights law, as well as the relevant United Nations resolutions. That all should be taken in the context of the general situation and the continuation of the illegitimate and belligerent Israeli occupation of the occupied Palestinian territory since 1967, including East Jerusalem, and the unequivocal calls to put an end to the half-century occupation.

In addition, the Non-Aligned Movement reiterates its strongest condemnation of Israel's systematic human rights violations against the Palestinian people, including, inter alia, the wilful killing and injury of civilians, including peaceful protesters; violent military raids, including, in particular, in refugee camps; the terrorizing of the civilian population; the imprisonment and detention of thousands of Palestinian civilians, including children and women; the confiscation of land and property and the demolition of Palestinian homes; the forced displacement of Palestinians, particularly Bedouin communities; and settler terrorism and violence against Palestinian civilians. We remind the Council of its duties in this regard.

The Non-Aligned Movement reiterates its calls for strengthened international efforts to achieve without delay an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 and a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution, and reiterates its readiness to cooperate and support all relevant efforts, in line with the decisions taken during the seventeenth Summit on the Island of Margarita, which declared 2017 as the International Year to End the Israeli Occupation of Palestine. In this regard, and on the basis of the Movement's quest to establish a peaceful and prosperous world and its role as an anti-war and pacifist force, we offer the good offices of the Non-Aligned Movement as a platform for global peace and in particular for respect for the right to life and the inalienable right of peoples to their self-determination and independence.

The States members of the Movement also condemn in the strongest possible terms the acts of aggression committed by Israel against the Syrian Arab Republic on 17 March and considers such acts to constitute a grave violation of Syrian sovereignty and a breach of international law, the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces of 1974. In this regard, we request the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility by clearly condemning those acts of aggression and taking the necessary measures to prevent their recurrence, and holding Israel accountable for threatening regional and international peace and security.

The States members of the Movement reiterate their condemnation of all the measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status and character of the occupied Syrian Golan. In this regard and in line with our principled position, we demand once again that Israel to abide by resolution 497 (1981) and fully withdraw

from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in accordance with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

In conclusion, the Non-Aligned Movement takes this opportunity to encourage States Members of the Organization to redouble their current efforts to overcome the ongoing shortcomings of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in order to ensure adequate, predictable and sustained funding of the Agency throughout its mandate so that it can fully meet the needs of Palestinian refugees and therefore fulfil its humanitarian mission.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Botswana.

Mr. Ntwaagae (Botswana): Allow me to express my delegation's deep appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate in order for us to share views on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

My delegation wishes to align itself with the statement delivered by delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

At the outset, let me take this opportunity to express our deep concern at the escalating tension and violent clashes that took place in and around the old city of Jerusalem this weekend. We join others in strongly condemning these acts of terror on innocent people and regret the loss of innocent lives and hope for a speedy recovery to those who are wounded.As the tension in occupied East Jerusalem continues to escalate and the people of Palestine continue living in the face of an unrelenting human tragedy of multiple conflicts and rising tension 50 years on, my Government wishes to reiterate the urgent need for the international community to swiftly address this rapidly deteriorating situation.

We regret that over the half century since Israel's occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, there has been little progress achieved to bring about a viable solution to the Palestinian quest for control of the occupied territories. It is sad that the lack of progress in the dialogue between the parties, continued illegal settlement activities, violence and increased radicalization still engulf the Middle East to this day. In this regard, Botswana condemns the ongoing violence and continued documented settlement-related activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, which regrettably undermine all international efforts towards the achievement of a lasting solution.

We believe that previous actions of the Council since 1967, including the adoption of resolution 242 (1967), resolution 338 (1973) and most recently resolution 2334 (2016) are positive steps in the right direction on the path towards delegitimizing the Israeli settlements and reiterating the call for the achievement of a two-State solution. In our view, this is the only viable solution to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We therefore call for the immediate and complete halt of any settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which are in violation of these resolutions and also a breach of international law.

If achieving a negotiated two-State outcome is indeed the only way to lay the foundation for an enduring peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, all stakeholders must take responsibility to ensure that this cause is achieved. In this respect, we welcome continued efforts of the United Nations, the United States, Russia, the European Union and regional partners who continue to work tirelessly for progress in the quest for solutions in the peace process in the Middle East so as to achieve a peaceful, fair, negotiated and lasting solution in line with international law.

Botswana's long-standing position on the Middle East peace process remains unequivocal. We support a negotiated solution that embraces the coexistence of Israel and Palestine as sovereign States, living side by side, that share not only a border, but also a common desire for peace, security and prosperity. We continue to call on both parties to resume dialogue as soon as possible without preconditions as an essential step towards achieving peace and a two-State solution.

In conclusion, Botswana reiterates that a stable and peaceful Middle East, free of violence with the two States living side by side in harmony, is not only good for peace and security in the region, which has enormous potential, but will also provide a conducive environment for a prosperous and peaceful Middle East. It is therefore pertinent for all of us to create the conditions for a return to negotiations to solve all final status issues on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions, mutual agreements and international law.

My delegation wishes to reaffirm our Government's solidarity with the Palestinian people and reiterates our resolve to find a lasting solution that will shape the

Middle East landscape in order to improve the quality of life of the innocent people in that country.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Bande (Nigeria): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's debate, which provides an opportunity to reflect on the fast-developing events in Jerusalem. We thank the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Mladenov, for his very lucid briefing and commend him for his efforts in the search for peace in the Middle East.

I wish to align myself with the statements made by the representative of Venezuela, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, and of Uzbekistan, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The surge in violence and senseless killings in Jerusalem perpetrated by extremists on both sides, so well articulated by speakers before me, is deeply troubling. Indeed, fears have been expressed that if the situation is not contained, it could escalate further, with its attendant unsavoury consequences. The international community must work in a concerted manner to avert such an occurrence. At this crucial moment, we find it crucially important for Security Council member States to use their influence with both sides in order to encourage them to de-escalate tensions. It is imperative to maintain the age-long status quo by ensuring the safety and security of both worshippers and visitors to the holy sites in Jerusalem. In that regard, we welcome the assurances of Prime Minister Netanyahu that Israel has no interest in changing the status quo.

It must be stated that recent developments must not obscure the underlying problem in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As widely acknowledged, the inherent difficulty is the lack of progress in the Middle East peace process. We would like to see a genuine effort on the part of Israeli and Palestinian leaders to return to negotiations. The current situation does not offer a sustainable solution to the question of Palestine. Indeed, it is creating despair among the people of Palestine and causing anxiety among the people of Israel.

It is evident that a departure from the current crisis and a revival of the peace process is hardly achievable without ending or reversing the policy of settlement expansion in the occupied Palestinian territories. We believe that there are a number of specific actions that are necessary to foster mutual respect and compromise, build confidence, and pave the way for the realization of the two-State solution. In that regard, we encourage Israel to take concrete steps to freeze and reverse all settlement-related activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. On their part, Palestinian leaders must also signal their readiness to return to the negotiating table by making enhanced efforts for unity and dealing with militancy and other internal security challenges.

Beyond a doubt, neither military might nor militancy will resolve the protracted conflict. The current stalemate in the Middle East peace process is neither ideal nor sustainable. Both sides must take concrete steps to return to negotiations on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions, the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant agreements between them. Nigeria supports the efforts of the international community towards establishing an environment conducive to a return to meaningful negotiations to end the occupation and resolve the long-standing conflict.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Mr. Hannigan (Iceland): I would like to thank the Chinese presidency for convening this meeting. I thank you, Ambassador Liu, for your personal presence here during the whole meeting.

I would also like to express our thanks to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his frank and informative assessment.

Iceland, like others, has been deeply concerned by rising tensions related to events around Al-Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, where violence has escalated in recent days. We are encouraged by the decision of the Israeli Government to remove metal detectors from the Al-Aqsa area, hopefully defusing the situation.

Political leaders on both sides carry a heavy responsibility to continue to reduce tensions, with the assistance of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Religious leaders also have a significant role to play. Confidence must be restored among Palestinians that Israel is not attempting to alter the status quo, and the Palestinian leadership must condemn all terrorist acts and do its utmost to prevent violence.

Looking at the bigger picture, continued violent acts committed by individual Palestinians against Israeli citizens must cease, and Israeli settlements must come to an end if the two-State solution is to remain viable.

The aim of resolution 2334 (2016), which implemented several conclusions of the 2016 Quartet report, was indeed to protect the two-State solution from further erosion, particularly by Israeli settlements policy. The regular reporting to the Security Council under the resolution is an important injection of accountability. A negotiated two-State solution is the only viable peace plan that will provide a just and lasting peace and allow both Israelis and Palestinians to live side by side in peace.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

Mrs. Nguyen (Viet Nam): At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation to the Chinese presidency for convening this important open debate, allowing us to share our views on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I also wish to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, for his informative briefing.

Viet Nam aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Last month marked the fiftieth anniversary of the 1967 Six-Day War, which resulted in Israel's occupation of the Palestinian and Arab lands. It is painful that we still have to witness unprecedented, grave crises in the Middle East, with the unsolved question of Palestine at the heart. After a half century, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains complex with the peace process stalled and a lack of dialogue between the parties. The situation has become ever-more complicated and inflamed by continued illegal settlement activities, acts of terror, the rise of violent extremism and increased radicalization. These ongoing activities have caused the vast loss of lives, disruption of culture and livelihoods of civilians, constitute an obstacle to the peace process, including a two-State solution, and pose a serious threat to regional and international peace and security.

Together with the international community, Viet Nam is deeply concerned about the serious developments in the region, especially the recent escalating tensions and violent clashes in and around the old city of Jerusalem. We strongly condemn all acts of terrorism and violence and extend our sincere condolences to the bereaved families of the victims, and wish a speedy recovery for the wounded. We are also very much concerned about the closure of the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque.

It is clear that half a century of occupation is a tragedy for all sides. It is illegal under international law and makes achieving peace impossible. We call on Israel to cease any further settlement activities, as well as its closure of the Gaza Strip, respect and restore the historic status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem, and at the same time, step up efforts to improve the living condition of the Palestinian people. We urge all parties concerned to fully freeze actions of hostility, incitement and violence, and allow the rapid and safe access of the United Nations and other humanitarian aid agencies to help ease the sufferings of the Palestinian people.

It is essential for all parties to exercise self-restraint; strictly comply with the Charter of the United Nations and international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law; implement the relevant United Nations resolutions and take concrete actions to reduce tensions and resume peace talks without any further delay.

Viet Nam reaffirms our unconditional support for the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for their fundamental rights, especially the sacred right of self-determination and the establishment of an independent and sovereign State. We consistently advocate the settlement of disputes through constructive dialogue and negotiations, in accordance with relevant resolutions of the United Nations, including Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map for peace in the Middle East, with a view to ultimately achieving a vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition.

In that regard, we welcome the continued efforts of the League of Arab States to relaunch serious peace negotiations based on a two-State solution, establishing a Palestinian State on the lines of 4 June 1967. We are also of the view that more integrated support from the international community is needed to facilitate Palestinian economic development and job creation and to enhance the State of Palestine's institutional capacity.

Today's open debate represents an important fresh appeal for action to push forward the peace process in the region. We must make use of every window of opportunity to strive for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East through negotiations,

under strong United Nations leadership and with the good will of all Member States and the proactive contributions of relevant regional organizations and other stakeholders.

Let me conclude by reiterating Viet Nam's readiness to continue to work with the international community for such meaningful collective endeavours.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bahrain.

Mr. Alrowaiei (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): We thank you, Sir, for having convened this debate, which is very important in the current circumstances.

We condemn in the strongest possible terms the Israeli measures that have prevented Muslim worshippers from accessing Al-Haram Al-Sharif, which runs counter to freedom of worship and is an unacceptable provocation to all Muslims around the world. It is part and parcel of a number of attempts by Israel to impede the status quo in Jerusalem and in Al-Aqsa Mosque.

We express our gravest concerns about the violence we have seen on the holy esplanade. We insist that the Mosque must to remain open to all worshippers. We call upon all parties to demonstrate restraint and to abide by international treaties, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention. The international community should assume its responsibilities to end all violations and any step to alter the historic and legal status of Jerusalem. The Kingdom of Bahrain therefore calls once again on the international community, and the Security Council in particular, to assume their responsibilities, to end those dangerous practices and to ensure respect for the relevant conventions and laws, international law as a whole and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council concerning the city of Jerusalem by providing the necessary protection to the Palestinian people and to the holy sites in order to protect freedom of religion.

A fair and sustainable peace in the region will depend to a great extent on the ability of the Palestinian people to recover their legitimate rights, including their right to an independent State within the borders of 4 June 1967, and on an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and to all forms of settlement.

Finally, Bahrain recalls that the Palestinian question remains among our major concerns. We therefore encourage any attempt to help the international community to find a fair and sustainable solution to that question on the basis of the two-State solution, international law and the Arab Peace Initiative, and to provide the region with a genuine opportunity to live in peace, security and development.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Bessedik (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, on behalf of the delegation of Algeria I would like to thank you, Sir, for having organized this open debate on the Middle East and the very dangerous developments in the occupied Palestinian territories. I also thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing on the issue.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Non-Aligned Movement.

Algeria condemns the violations and dangerous attacks that continue to be carried out by the Israeli occupying forces against Palestinian worshippers around the Al-Aqsa Mosque and elsewhere in the West Bank. We also condemn the unfair blockade of the West Bank, which continutes despite the many international calls to end the occupation, including resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. The violations and violence are very dangerous. They includes murder, the arrest of Palestinian worshippers around the Al-Aqsa Mosque and others. Those measures deprive Palestinians of the freedom of religion. We also see attempts to displace citizens and the destruction of houses. We condemn such horrible crimes in the strongest terms. Furthermore, the practices of the occupying forces constitute a flagrant violation of international law, including international humanitarian law, without accountability and in total impunity. That is why the international community must act to end those heinous crimes.

My delegation expresses its full solidarity with the people and authorities of the Palestinian State, a brother country. We have always supported the Palestinian people and their just cause to recover their full rights, including full and entire recognition of the Palestinian people under international law, on the territories that have been occupied since 1967, and we call for the creation of an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In the face of this dangerous spike in violence and systematic efforts to Judaize the Islamic holy sites, we call on the international community to accelerate

its joint efforts to ensure that the Palestinian people are not left without defence and can protect the holy sites. The criminal acts are increasing by the day, and we therefore call on the Council to fully assume its responsibilities and to ensure that all of its resolutions on the subject are fully applied.

In conclusion, we restate that the capacity of the international community to establish international peace and security is at stake here. We need to show solidarity, and Algeria participates generously in that solidarity, by seeking to establish a sustainable solution that reflects its commitment to the three pillars of the United Nations, namely, peace and security, development and human rights.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Almahmoud (United Arab Emirates): On behalf of the United Arab Emirates, I congratulate China on acceding to the presidency of the Council and appreciate its presiding over the quarterly open debate on the Middle East. I thank Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing this morning.

The United Arab Emirates associates itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Today's debate could not be more urgent or timely, as we are witnessing a dangerous deterioration of the security situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. The United Arab Emirates is particularly alarmed by Israel's continued aggression towards the holy sites in Jerusalem and the measures that it has taken to change the status quo in the city. We strongly condemn the closure of Al-Aqsa Mosque. The United Arab Emirates calls for the removal of all obstructions to access for worshippers at Al-Aqsa Mosque and full respect for the historical and legal status of Jerusalem.

The international community must engage to de-escalate the tensions in Al-Aqsa Mosque as well as urge Israel, the occupying Power, to honour its legal and international commitments and end its unilateral actions. To that end, the United Arab Emirates expresses its support for the tireless efforts of His Majesty King Abdullah of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the custodian of the Muslim holy sites in East Jerusalem, to ease tensions and maintain the status quo on the ground.

Israel's illegal settlement activities and other provocative measures continue to pose major obstacles to achieving a two-State solution that grants the Palestinian people their inalienable rights. The plight of the Palestinian people has endured for nearly seven decades, and it must end. We call on the international community and the Security Council to take all measures necessary to reach a two-State solution that establishes an independent Palestinian State based on the June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, according to the Arab Peace Initiative, the relevant resolutions and the Madrid Principles.

The paramount aim for the United Arab Emirates is the promotion of security and stability in our region. The continuation of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and the lack of a just settlement to the Palestinian issue have critically destabilized the Middle East. The situation in the occupied territories paves the way for extremist groups to spread their messages of terrorism and violent extremism and prey upon populations with their destructive agenda throughout the region.

In conclusion, we call on the Security Council and the community of nations to hold States accountable for spreading conflict and regional insecurity by supporting and financing terrorism and, in turn, violating international law and this body's resolutions. The United Arab Emirates believes that international law and the institutions that uphold its pillars are the key to lasting stability, and we appeal to Member States to comply with the decisions of the Security Council, in accordance with Article 25 of the United Nations Charter.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Qassem Agha (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I will not take up so much of your time, Mr. President.

As is his custom, the representative of the Saudi-Wahhabi-expiatory regime that sponsors terrorism worldwide has made a statement that is replete with falsehoods and distorts the truth in a desperate attempt to serve the interests of Israel, by deviating from the core of this agenda item, namely, ending the Israeli occupation of Arab lands; to mislead the international community as to the truth of what is taking place in

my country, Syria, regarding the achievements of the Syrian army and its allies in facing the war of terrorism that has been imposed on us for six years; and to cover up what the Bani Saud regime is doing by becoming allies with Israel and certain sheikhdoms and kingdoms of the Gulf region, as well as Governments of that region and others, in supporting and financing armed groups.

The representative of the Saudi regime pretended to have forgotten to mention that the terrorism prevailing throughout the world is nothing but the result of the adoption by the ruling regime in the Bani Saud kingdom of an extremist religious doctrine and its promotion worldwide by supporting religious centres on which it spends billions of dollars annually to spread Wahhabism, a doctrine based on the rejection of others, charging them with infidelity and condoning their killing.

Since the onset of the terrorism war imposed on my country, Syria, we have warned against the fact that the terrorism affecting our country originates in certain States of the Gulf area, particularly Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Today, after more than six years of our analysis, some are now saying that Qatar is a sponsor of terrorism. I, in turn, say to the representative of the Saudi regime that the day will inevitably come when his country will be described as a key State sponsor of terrorism, and the victims of terrorism in Syria and the world will confront him and everyone who has supported terrorism in Syria and the world and will hold them accountable, wherever they are.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The representative of Israel has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give her the floor.

Ms. Meitzad (Israel): It was unfortunate to hear today certain States making statements that are completely detached from reality. Instead of calming tensions, some abuse this platform to fuel the flames by making inflammatory and false accusations.

Let me be clear. Israel is committed to upholding the status quo concerning the Temple Mount. Israel safeguards the freedom of religion and the right to worship of Muslims, Christians and Jews, as well as members of all other religions, at the historical sites.

Allow me to refer to some of the false accusations that were made here today by certain Member States.

I was surprised to hear the representative of Lebanon refer to her country as a beacon of democracy and a champion of human rights. To the representative of a Government in which a designated terrorist organization, Hizbullah, holds several positions and is considered a legitimate political party, I would suggest a reality check. This is the same Hizbullah that has been known to commit unspeakable atrocities in Syria and is notorious for its destabilizing terrorist activities throughout the Middle East. As for Lebanon taking the floor to speak about human rights, I would suggest reading the latest report on torture in Lebanon by Lebanese authorities of Syrian nationals in Lebanese custody.

The Iranian representative must have no shame to be able to sit here today and speak in this Chamber as his country continues to promote terrorism and destabilize the Middle East. This is the representative of a regime that is arming terrorist organizations across the region and bolstering the murderous Al-Assad regime in Syria. Iran does all this in violation of numerous Security Council resolutions.

Iran is continuing to develop an offensive ballistic-missile programme in direct violation of resolution 2231 (2015), and, as stated in the report of the Secretary-General on that resolution (S/2017/515), Iran continues to export illicit weapons to various terrorist groups and conflict zones.

Iran even went as far as to launch a ballistic missile at a very specific and intentional target, the Star of David. This is a direct and unacceptable threat by one Member State against another.

When it comes to the credibility of the Syrian representative who spoke here earlier today, I am certain that I do not need to remind any representative now sitting in this Chamber that this is the same representative who keeps on saying and continues to claim that his Government is not using chemical weapons against its own people, this despite all the concrete evidence to the contrary.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The representative of Saudi Arabia has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): When I hear the Syrian representative speak, I feel like laughing. He described us as the sons of Saud; we are very proud to be sons of Saud, from the Saud dynasty. He accused us of promoting Islam, which we certainly do, but we do not use chemical weapons to

kill our own children and citizens, as does the Syrian regime. We do not terrorize our own people, as does the Syrian regime.

Whenever I hear such accusations from the Syrian representative, I feel like telling them that he is really talking about himself, not us. What they are doing is trying to meddle in Gulf country affairs and the crises in that area. They want to take advantage of that situation, but they should not interfere in these things. If it were us, we would be ashamed. We would at least try to avoid disgracing our own Government and killing our children.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.